

Solomon's Magnificent Temple

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Virginia Research Royal Arch Chapter No. 1753

July 13, 1985

"The Temple I am going to build," said Solomon, "will be huge and incredibly beautiful." In his *Encyclopedia Of Freemasonry* Dr. Albert Mackey said, "The Temple must have been one of the most magnificent structures of an ancient world." H.V.B. Voorhis in *Facts On Freemasons* describes it as the most perfect edifice ever built which symbolized perfect development of mind and character.

It was not a huge structure when compared to. present day buildings. The main chambers of the Temple were only thirty by ninety feet on the inside. It had an annex of rooms and a porch which made it about one hundred and twenty feet long. This is about the same as an average sized church or many of our present-day Lodge buildings. It was not the size but the beauty and splendor of the materials and the decoration that made it famous.

In describing "Solomon's Magnificent Temple" we will use the descriptions as found in the Scriptures and as given in Masonic references. We will see some variation from our Masonic Legend. If we compare the account as given in the Bible – First Kings and Second Chronicles – we also find minor variations within the Scriptures. Some commentators and authors of Masonic publications question the building costs as well as the large number of men used to build the Temple. We should remember that this history has been handed down almost 3,000 years. It undoubtedly originated on a scroll and has been translated from language to language. One commentator pointed out that there may be exaggerations to emphasize the impressiveness of the ideal Temple. It is highly likely that

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the costs and number of people involved in building the Temple also included Solomon's palace and other buildings in his court.

King David wanted to build a house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and a dwelling place for God. This was the Ark of God which Moses had carried up from Horeb. David had made preparations to build the Temple, but God would not let him. God said to David, "You shall not build a house for my name because you have been a man of war and have shed blood." The Lord told David, "It is your son, Solomon, who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his Father."

David gave his son, Solomon, the blueprint for the Temple and its surroundings – the treasuries, the upstairs rooms, the inside rooms, and the place of the mercy seat. He also gave him plans of the outer courts of the house of the Lord, all the annex rooms, the storage areas as well as the holy vessels.

Solomon was given gold for the articles that were to be made of gold, silver for the silver articles and all the articles used in every kind of service – lamps, table for Shewbread, the forks, the basins, pitchers, altar of incense and the gold cherubim. He also furnished all of the bronze, iron, wood, precious stones, and marble slabs in abundance.

David had accumulated much wealth from the spoils of the wars in which he had been engaged. King David then said, "because of my devotion to the Temple of God, I am giving all my private treasures to aid in this construction. This is in addition to the building materials I have already contributed." The personal contributions consisted of \$85,000,000 worth of gold and \$20,000,000 worth of the purest silver to be used for overlaying the walls of the building. Then the clan leaders, the heads of the tribes, the army officers and the administrative officers of the King pledged \$145,000,000 in gold;

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\$30,000,000 in silver; \$50,000 in foreign currency; 800 tons of bronze; and 4,600 tons of iron. They also contributed great amounts of jewelry, which was deposited in the Temple treasure. They were happy and excited for the opportunity of service.

At that particular period, we read in the Scriptures that gold was as plentiful in Israel as rocks in the roads and cedar and cypress were as plentiful as Sycamore wood.

King Hiram of Tyre, a great admirer of David, sent congratulations and good wishes to King Solomon when he learned that Solomon was the new King of Israel. Solomon replied with a proposal about the Temple the Lord wanted him to build. Send your woodsmen to the mountains of Lebanon to cut cedar timber. I will send my men to work beside them. I will pay your men whatever wages you ask; for, as you know, no one in Israel can cut timber like your Sidonians.

Hiram was very pleased with the message from Solomon and said that he would do as asked. Hiram asked for food for his household. In turn, Solomon sent him an annual payment of 125,000 bushels of wheat, 125,000 bushels of barley, 120,000 gallons of olive oil, and 120,000 gallons of wine.

King Solomon took census of all the foreigners in his country and found that there were 153,600 of them. We read in Second Chronicles that he drafted or indentured 70,000 as common laborers, 80,000 as Stonecutters, and 3,600 as foremen.

Let's take an imaginary tour around and throughout Solomon's magnificent Temple. We will particularly note the beautiful work of Hiram Abif, the artificer from Naphtali.

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As we approach the Temple we find it was surrounded by two spacious courts. The outer court was for the public functions and the inner court for the priests.

Hiram Abiff cast a bronze altar thirty feet long, thirty feet wide and fifteen feet above the ground. This was used for the sacrifices and offering of sheep or cattle and was placed near the middle of the inner court. He forged a huge tank called the Molten Sea, fifteen feet from brim to brim and seven and one-half feet high. This tank was set on the back of ten metal oxen. The tank and oxen were also made of bronze and cast as one piece. There were twelve of these oxen with three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The walls of the tank were four inches or a handbreadth thick and it held 12,000 gallons of water. It was placed in the southeast corner of the inner court for the priests to wash in. Hiram Abiff also constructed ten vats of lavers for water to wash the offerings (sheep or cattle). These vats were made of bronze and placed on four-wheeled movable stands, each six feet square and four feet high. They held 240 gallons of water and five were placed on the left and five on the right of the court. Hiram Abiff made the necessary shovels, pots and basins and cast them from bronze. These were used in carrying out the sacrifices.

As we approach the entrance of the Temple, we see the two famous brass pillars placed on the right and left of the porch. They, too, were made by Hiram Abiff. He made chains and placed them on top of the pillars and attached 100 pomegranates to the chains. We enter the covered porch which is fifteen feet deep and runs along the entire thirty feet width of the house. The inner wall and ceiling are overlaid with pure gold.

At the entrance of the Temple are square door posts of olive wood. Two folding doors made of cypress wood have angels, palm trees and open flowers carved on them. These doors are carefully overlaid with gold.

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We now see the outer room which is sixty feet long and thirty feet wide and forty-five feet high. This room is the Holy Place or often known as the Hekal or sanctuary. The entire inside of the Temple was paneled with cedar and the floor was made of cypress board. All the walls, beams, doors, and thresholds throughout the temple are plated with pure gold with angels engraved on the wall.

In the Holy Place we see the altar of incense, golden candlesticks, and golden table of shewbread. This table is where the Bread of the Presence of God is displayed. We also see ten tables made of gold, five are on the right and five on the left. These are used to lay the offering on before the sacrifice. This room is used for the daily worship of the temple.

This brings us to the Holy of Holies which is the innermost Chamber. It is separated from the sanctuary by doors of olive wood, richly sculptured and inlaid with gold. Across the entrance is placed a blue, purple, and scarlet veil of the finest linen. It is decorated with angels. Within the Holy of holies Solomon placed two sculptured statues of angels and plated them with gold. Their wings extended across the room from wall to wall. This is the most sacred of all chambers in the Temple. It Will be the resting place of the ark of the Covenant called the Glory of Israel. It will also be the permanent dwelling place of God. God will become visual in the appearance of a cloud over the Ark of the Covenant. Remember, King David was given instructions by God that the Temple be built by his son Solomon as a place for the Ark to rest and God to live in.

We have now viewed the main chambers of the Temple. We will go to an annex of rooms against the outer wall. They extend along the full length of both sides and to the back of the Temple. There are three stories and each story is seven and one-half feet high. The lower floor is seven and one-half feet wide, the second story nine feet wide, and upper

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floor ten and one-half feet wide. These rooms are connected to the walls of the Temple by beams resting on blocks built out from the wall, so the beams were not inserted into the walls themselves. The bottom floor of the side rooms can be entered from the right side of the Temple. There are winding stairs going up to the second floor and another flight of stairs leads from the second to the third floor. These rooms were also plated with gold. It is supposed that they were used by the Priests to store articles used in sacrificial and other ceremonies. Masonically, we allude to the ground floor and middle Chamber in our degree work.

This completes our tour and highlights of "Solomon's Magnificent Temple." It was built in seven and one-half years which was in Solomon's eleventh year as King of Israel. It stood about four hundred years until destroyed by the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar.

"Its dedication was one of the most solemn days in the history of Israel," writes Joan Comay in the book, *Who's Who In The Old Testament*. We read in the scriptures that Solomon called a convocation of all the leaders of Israel to observe the transferring of the Ark of the covenant of the Lord from the tent or tabernacle to the Temple. During the festivities the priests carried the Ark to the inner room of the Temple, the Holy of Holies. They placed it beneath the angels' wings which spread over the Ark from wall-to-wall.

The Bible tells us there was a choir accompanied by 120 priests with trumpets, cymbals, lyres, and harps to praise and thank the Lord. Their theme was "He is good for his" mercy endureth forever."

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A multitude of people had assembled from all Israel to attend the ceremonies. We read that the Temple shone and dazzled the eyes of the people as they entered. "They were struck with bewildering amazement by the splendor of the gold on every side of them."

Solomon had made a bronze platform on which to stand and address the people in the court. He placed it in the center of the outer court in front of the Altar of the Lord. Now, as all the people watched, he kneeled down, reached out his arms toward heaven and prayed a long prayer. In his prayer he asked God to arise into his resting place, Thou and the Ark of Thy strength. Solomon praised God for what he had done and asked him to watch over the Temple day and night and forgive his people for their evil deeds.

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering and sacrifices and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple. As the house was filled with the glory of the Lord, the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord. They then bowed to the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord saying "For he is good for his mercy endureth forever." Thus was "Solomon's Magnificent Temple" given to God for his use forever.

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